

KENTUCKY THEATER (Commercial Building)
649-651 South Fourth Avenue
Louisville
Jefferson County
Kentucky

HABS NO.KY-159

HABS
KY
56-LOUVI,
32 -

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Department of the Interior
Southeast Region
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

KENTUCKY THEATRE

HABS
124
56-LOUVI,
32-

Location: 649-51 South Fourth Avenue: Louisville,
Jefferson County, Kentucky, USGS Quadrant:
Louisville West, Universal Transverse
Mercator Coordinates: 16.6087110.4233740

Present Owner: Urban Renewal Agency of the Louisville Community
Development Cabinet, 727 W. Main Street
Louisville, Kentucky 40202, August, 1983

Present Occupant: Kentucky Theatre

Present Use: Movie Theatre

Significance: The Kentucky Theatre demonstrates a rich interest
in surface textures, combining patterned glazed-
brick with classical, terra cotta ornament on the
facade. It is one of the finest of the older movie
theatres remaining in Louisville.

PART 1. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: 1921 ("Kentucky Theatre, Classical Building").
2. Architect: Joseph and Joseph. This firm was one of the most prominent in the city from 1915 to 1940. They were prolific designers of theatres both in Louisville and the surrounding region.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The theatre was built for the Modern Amusement Company. The Company had a similar theatre of the same name and by the same architects built in Lexington, Kentucky.
4. Original plans and construction: The newspaper article "Kentucky Theatre Classic Buildings" described the interior as follows:
"The marble from the entry lobby is from Italy and Greece. Inlays of Italian rosata are above this and the walls above are executed in imported Caen stone. The inner lobby is furnished in a combination of marble, bronze and mirrors and crystal ceiling chandeliers and wall brackets with prisms from Czechoslovakia...An art/glass skylight has vari-colored lights which can be controlled at will."

An original photo of the facade is available in the
Joseph and Joseph Catalog of 1925.

5. Alterations and additions: The major documented alterations were made in 1940 ("Face Lift and Hair Do"). The seating was increased from 780 to 1,100 by the addition of a balcony. The seats were modernized and the color scheme was changed from blue and maroon to rose. The lobby was paneled in burl walnut. The exterior marque was altered and the first floor entrance was sheathed in carrara glass. The total for the alteration cost \$30,000.

B. HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

The Kentucky Theatre was one of a number of elegant movie theatres on Fourth Avenue. This area was the largest concentration of this type of entertainment establishment in Louisville from the 1920s to the 1960s. Today, only two theatres still show movies and two others have live stage performance. All other theatres in this once "Movie Row" have been demolished.

Michael Switow, the original principal of the Modern Amusement Company, was originally a small restaurant owner. He oversaw the alterations to the theatre in 1940 at the age of eighty.

PART II ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The facade of the Kentucky is an orange-glazed brick marked by diamond patterns formed by darker brick-work on the second-story of the facade. Of interest are the classical decoration in glazed terra cotta consisting of urns and winged lions in the arch of the window surround, cartouches and a balustrade on the parapet. The facade is rich in textures and color contrasts in the building materials.
2. Condition of fabric: The building exterior of structural steel and reinforced concrete is in fairly good condition. The roof and skylights are apparently not leaking. The brick is in need of tuck-pointing.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: Fifty-one feet by two hundred feet. The structure is two-stories in height and consists of a single bay with three central windows on the second floor.
2. Foundations: The front portion of the building has a concrete foundation. The auditorium foundation is brick over concrete spread footing.

3. Walls: The walls of the first floor facade are clad in various materials including cararra glass. The upper story is clad in orange, glazed brick with a diamond-pattern laid in slightly darker brick.
 4. Structural system, framing: On the first floor, the floor of the commercial space, which is over a partial basement, is wood frame. The remainder of the first floor is concrete slab on grade. On the second floor, the front portion is a concrete floor over reinforced concrete "T" beams supported by brick party walls. The balcony has a concrete floor over steel "I" beams supported by party walls. The roof has steel trusses and purlins supported by brick pilasters in party walls.
 5. Openings:
 - a. Doors: The entrance doors are full glass light metal doors.
 - b. Windows: Three windows with ten lights each are set in terra cotta surrounds with classical ornamentation in the arched crowns, on the second floor. Brick Voussoirs and a Keystone articulate each window. Two smaller windows with three lights are set in terra cotta surrounds with a garland motif on the lintel.
 6. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: There is a gabled roof over the auditorium and a flat, built-up roof over the front portion. There are two "gable" type skylights over the office area.
 - b. Cornice: This structure has an extended cornice in terra cotta with dentils. This is surmounted by a brick parapet resting on a bandcourse. The parapet has a terra cotta coping and three sections of inset balustrades.
- C. Description of Interior:
1. Floor Plans:
 - a. The first floor consists of a large foyer on the north side of the front section of the building and commercial space on the south. The foyer leads to the lobby which consumes the full width of the building with restrooms off of the lobby. The rear section of the first floor is auditorium space.
 - b. The second floor consists of a variety of small rooms used for office and storage space in the front of the building. The central portion of the second floor is used as the balcony of the auditorium.

2. Stairways: There are three staircases: One rises from the front, exterior of the building on the north side to the second floor and again to the roof. Another descends from the lobby to the basement in the center of the building; The third rises from the lobby to the balcony.
3. Flooring: The lobby, foyer, offices and aisles are carpeted. The seating area has concrete flooring, the restrooms have ceramic tile, and terrazzo is in the stair to the second floor offices.
4. Wall and Ceiling finish: The walls and ceilings in the lobby and foyer are plaster and wood. There are plaster walls in the remainder of the building with some glass block in the second floor offices. Acoustical fabric has been applied to auditorium walls over murals of tropical vegetation between pilasters. The restrooms have ceramic tile walls. Acoustical tile ceilings are located in the offices, auditorium, and restrooms, hung from or applied to old plaster ceilings. The old decorative plaster ceiling still exists in the auditorium area.
5. Doorways and Doors: Doors between the lobby and foyer are wooden with twelve inch circular glass lights and semicircular brass push plates and handles.
6. Notable hardware: The brass push plates and brass handles on the lobby doors and the art decor aluminum and brass handrails in the stairs are considered notable.
7. Mechanical equipment: The original HVAC system has been replaced. The existing system is elaborate, with heating by gas and cooling by condenser units on the roof. Lighting is concealed fluorescent and incandescent. Decorative painted tin lighting fixtures (incandescent) are located in the auditorium.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The Kentucky Theatre faces almost due west. The structure sets directly on the sidewalk. The structures in the block-face are of similar scale with the exception of the Brown Hotel at the north end of the block which is sixteen stories in height. The Kentucky Theatre once faced a street which has been converted into a pedestrian mall with various small trees and benches.

PART III SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Early Views: Joseph and Joseph: Architects and Engineers.
New York: Architectural Catalog Co., 1925. (copy at
Historic Landmarks and Preservation Districts Commission,
Louisville, Kentucky). Facade.
- B. Bibliography:
 - 1. Secondary and Published sources:
 - "Facelift and Hair Do" Louisville Courier-Journal,
7 July 1940.
 - "Kentucky Theatre, Classical Building," Louisville Times,
6 October 1921.
 - "Movie Theatre Named After State Thronged at Opening,"
Louisville Times, 7 October 1921 .
- C. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated: Original plans and early
photographs may be available in the archival files of Joseph and
Joseph Architect and Engineers, Louisville, Kentucky.

Prepared by:
Marty Poynter Hedgepeth
Director of Research
Historic Landmarks and Preservation
Districts Commission
April 1983

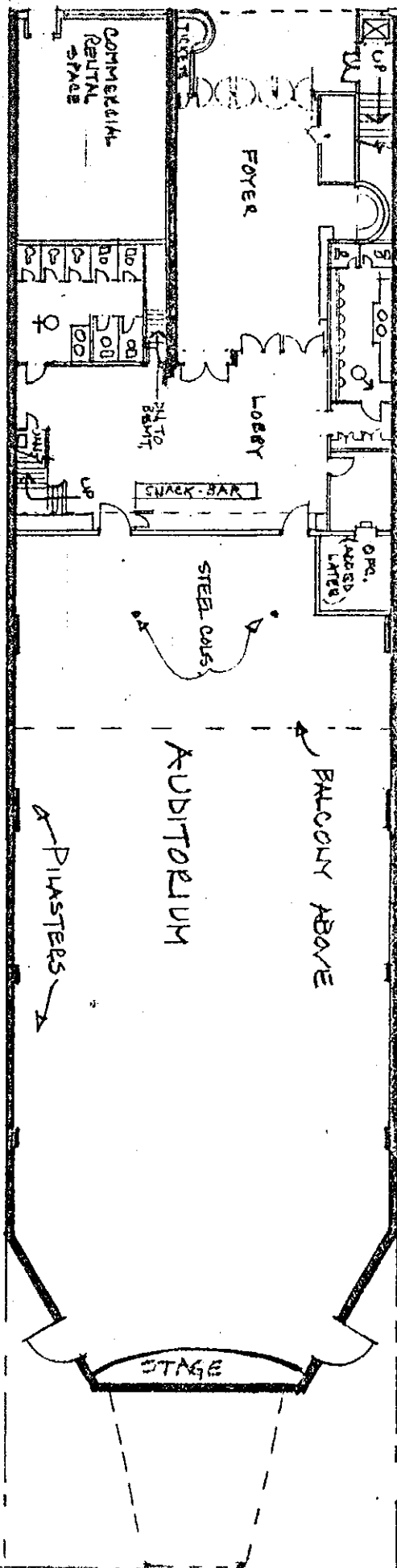
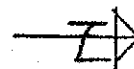
PART IV PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was sponsored by the City of Louisville. The historical documentation was compiled by Marty Poynter Hedgepeth, Director of Research of the Historic Landmarks and Preservation Districts Commission. The structural information was compiled by Lane Stumpler of Ward and Taylor Architects, Louisville, Kentucky. The photography was completed by Jimmie Wallace, photographer, Louisville Community Development Cabinet, Louisville, Kentucky.

← FOURTH AVENUE →

HABS NO. KY-159

Page 6

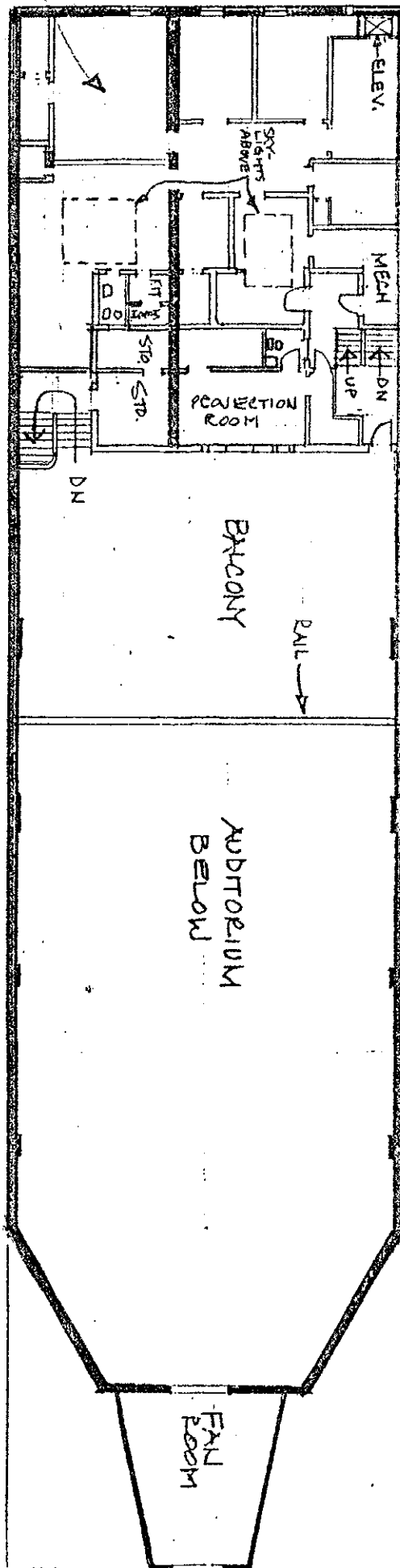


SKETCH OF FIRST FLOOR PLAN

NOT TO SCALE
(APPROX. 1" = 20'-0")

KENTUCKY THEATER, LOUISVILLE, KY

WAB + TAYLOR ARCHITECTS L.S. 8.12.83



OFFICES OF ASSOCIATED
THEATERS OF KENTUCKY.
ORIGINAL OFFICE
LAYOUT UNKNOWN

SKETCH OF SECOND FLOOR PLAN
NOT TO SCALE
(APPROX. 1"=20'-0")

KENTUCKY THEATER, LOUISVILLE, KY
WARD & TAYLOR ARCHITECTS L.S. 8.12.83